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Water and wine fuel growth of Green Valley

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Characters, tales of ghosts enrich history

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Green Valley was officially established in 1853, and as it became inhabited was described by a writer of the time as being almost a Garden of Eden:

“...Perfection as regards scenery. Bold, well-defined mountains and ravishing beauty of hill and glade, interspersed with wooded knolls and shady ravines. Residences placed in the midst of gardens with every color of flower and foliage imaginable, while on the hillsides appear acre upon acre of grapevines arranged to perfection. At the upper end of the valley are the famous Green Valley falls, which pour their murmuring waters into the stream after purling down the mountain sides in beauteous cascade.”

Shady pools of water, high rocks and colorful wildflowers filled out the description.

Green Valley was originally part of the Soscol Land Grant. In 1848, the early settlers of the valley were John Stilts, W.P. Durbin and Charles Ramsey. These men and others soon discovered that the area was particularly well-suited for grape-growing, and the valley became noted for its bountiful harvests and quality wines.

The first house built was the stone house of the Swift family, erected in the 1850s. It is now headquarters of the Green Valley Country Club. Granville Swift was a member of the Bear Flag Revolt and reportedly the first to hoist the California Republic Bear Flag on June 14, 1846.

Another early-day arrival in Green Valley was John Volypka, an Austrian. He settled on his farm in 1858, planted his vines and built a wine cellar. Volypka's wine proved to be quite a profitable enterprise. By 1863, it was being shipped to San Francisco from Cordelia.

In 1860, Henry Shultz planted his vineyard. He and his brother formed the winery C. Shultz & Co. They built an enormous wine cellar, 38 feet by 100 feet. It was said to be able to house about 25 casks and, counting pipes and barrels, that the entire operation's capacity was about 10,000 gallons of wine.

Henry Brown was also a large producer of wine in the area, planting his vine in 1863.

It is not clear exactly when F.S. Jones arrived in the Green Valley. Some accounts have him arriving in 1860. Others in 1868. If he arrived as early as 1860, he first settled in an adobe that Gen. Mariano Vallejo built in the 1830s as a residence for his vaqueros.

Though remodeled a number of times, this house is known as the Vallejo/Jones House on Green Valley Road and is the oldest adobe in Solano County. Jones married Granville Swift's daughter and they moved into Swift's stone house.

Jones was destined to become the area's largest wine producer. He had all the necessary appliances and paraphernalia of the wine-making trade and constructed a cellar capable of holding 50,000 gallons of wine. He laid out 90 acres in vines, distilling 6,000 gallons of wine per acre.

But nature was to have her say. Disaster struck in the early 1870s when a plant root disease devastated the vineyards of Green Valley. Grapes continued to be harvested, but too many of the growers were never able to recover what they lost and so they went into other areas of farming such as fruit crops and took up stock raising.